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A FAIR SKIN: Civilization's Heritage, or the use of colour among races

But Nature halts not with the fruitful earth,
But seeks her crown in perfect womanhood :
Her grand achievement and her end and aim
In working ever through the eons past,
Transmuting by her secret alchemy
The fading rose into the perfect flower !

—*The Dual Image, Book III.*

THE following summary of facts and the inferences based thereon are intended to prove to the thoughtful reader that the genesis of a white race of people from a preceding coloured one, or, under change of conditions, a coloured one from a white race, is not, as hitherto conceived, directly due to the influence of climate, but to the degree of civilization that has been in operation through long periods ; also, that the only use of a dark-coloured skin is, and was originally in barbarous states of society, when men were obliged to go naked, to protect the owners thereof from the injurious effects of the elements, and especially of exposure to the burning rays of a tropical sun, which otherwise would prove fatal and lead to the extinction of the race.

In dealing with the subject it may be noted briefly that a tropical climate is usually considered of itself, aside from any habits that may be retained of a previous uncivilized state, sufficient to produce *de novo* and perpetuate a dark-coloured skin. But, as will be shown, this common belief is based on a hasty generalization rather than on careful inquiry and observation ; for when we come to examine the matter we find that coloured races are not confined to the tropics, but extend north and south far beyond the tropics, even beyond the temperate zones. On the other hand, different degrees of colour between white and black are to be found within the the tropics, and especially in India, where in the same locality many people

may be met with as dark as the ordinary negro, and many again of a light-olive colour, while a few individuals of the higher castes show that they have practically passed the line that separated the coloured from the uncoloured inhabitants of the world.

There is, therefore, much diversity of colour among the people of India ; and this diversity can only be accounted for by considering the different modes of life that have acted for centuries upon the various classes and castes of the country. Take, for instance, the coolie class, which follow outdoor employment labouring daily in the fields with merely a strip of cotton cloth about the loins. They are, as may be expected, uncultured and very dark in hue, the colour being by no means due to their present daily exposure—for they all exhibit the particular shades that characterized them at birth. On the other hand, the better classes including Merchants, Traders, and others, who have followed indoor employment for generations, are many degrees fairer. These latter, as a rule, are fairly educated and never appear outdoors without being thoroughly and suitably clothed. Among them may be found many individuals almost as fair as Europeans.

It is to be noted that these very different shades and varieties of colour, not taking into account the descendants of the original inhabitants of the land, are to be met with among people of undoubted Aryan descent ; and, the Aryans being a fair race, those that passed into Persia and India must also have been originally a fair people. It will, therefore, be seen that, if climate alone, aside from certain habits of life, caused the change from fair to dark, all should be alike dark in colour, which is by no means the case. The degree of dark pigment in the skin bears an intimate relation to the particular habits of life followed by the different classes operating through long periods. The degree of colour of any section has relation to the degree of exposure for such periods to the weather at all seasons. The darker the skin of the individual, or the more pigment it contains, the greater the resisting power on exposure to the sun's rays. We know not why this layer of dark pigment beneath the cuticle should prevent the skin from blistering on exposure to the rays of tropical sun ; we only note the fact that it does so afford the

necessary protection.* And that this resisting power of the dark skin is not due to the influence of long seasoning, we know from the fact that infants of all ages are carried about naked and otherwise exposed with impunity to the direct rays of a sun that would in a short time blister a white skin as effectually as boiling water. The validity of our argument, based on these facts, borne out in a remarkable manner in the case of albino-born children, who at all ages must be suitably clothed to protect them from the sun, which would otherwise be as fatal to them as to the children of Europeans residing in the country. It may be noted also that among adults patches of skin that have lost their colouring through skin-baldness will be injuriously affected and even blistered on exposure for any length of time to the sun's rays.

In considering the matter, it appears, as observation shows, that the dark skin does not (like the white) become heated on exposure to the sun, but feels moist and cool to the touch. The dark-pigment layer under the cuticle is thus seen to confer protecting qualities that are altogether wanting in the white skin. There is, therefore, in the dark skin a natural provision, though we know not as yet its *modus operandi*, whereby men have been enabled to live in every climate during the uncivilized ages of the world; for a white race could not under any conditions that we know of exist under entire exposure to the elements. Even indoors, in tropical climates, Europeans and European children could not remain even partially unclothed for any considerable time without feeling the injurious effects of exposure to the air.

In uncivilized communities a coloured skin is therefore a necessity; it is Nature's provision for the well-being of an uncivilized man, and is as needful to his condition of life as dark pigment is to the chambers of the eye. But, this being so, the

*The experiments of Finsen and others with the Chameleon show that the creature concentrated the whole of its dark pigment over that half of its body exposed to the blue actinic rays of the sun, to neutralise the injurious effects they would otherwise exert on its integument.

fact is evident that in more highly civilized states of society, where children as well as adults are suitably clothed from infancy, the perpetuation of a dark skin is unnecessary, and therefore has been discontinued in all such states—not indeed abruptly, but slowly, in the course of generations. But that the majority of the higher and wealthier classes in India are not now a white people is owing chiefly to the old habit of allowing their children to go about, as a rule, with very little clothing until near puberty, which, according to the facts enumerated, necessitates the perpetuation of a coloured skin as a safeguard against the elements during childhood.

It is therefore to be noted that, if under favouring circumstances, in any climate a white race can be evolved from a preceding dark one, a dark race can be similarly evolved from a fair one by the latter taking on the habits of uncivilized life. This change is a necessity if the well-being of the race is to be preserved. It is, then, a current delusion that a temperate or even inclement northern or southern climate can of itself produce and perpetuate a fair race otherwise than indirectly—by stimulating man to devise artificial means to protect his body from cold and the injurious effects of the elements. But where man has braved the elements and gone naked, like the now extinct natives of Tasmania and the inhospitable Terra del Fuego, no approach is made towards the attainment of a white skin; for so long as man leads a rude, uncivilized life, going about in a state of nudity, his coloured skin must be retained as one of the necessities of his condition, no matter in what latitude or locality he may be placed.

If, therefore, we find among the inhabitants of India shades of complexion so fair that, as regards colour, the owners might almost pass for Europeans, side by side with those deeper tints that bear with impunity continuous exposure at all seasons to the Indian sun, we can hardly maintain that climate of itself is the cause of coloured races. The statement that Europeans resident in India become swarthy after a time is a mere inference based on the temporary bronzing of the features from exposure out-of-doors: for against this there is said to be a colony of Jews, settled on the west coast of India for some eighteen centuries, who are still a white people; but they have not followed the

habits of the country as regards clothing, nor have they intermarried with the inhabitants of the land as other coloured Jews in the East have been in the habit of doing.

But, as already remarked, in all civilized states of society, where children as well as adults are fully clothed, a coloured skin is unnecessary and need not be perpetuated as a protection against the parching effects of the elements. And, being unnecessary, Nature in time dispenses with the colouring beneath the cuticle and provides man instead with a fair skin of great delicacy—as regards personal appearance the very crown of evolution in this particular line. Although the Aryan populations of India and Persia, by adopting to a certain extent the habits of the original dark inhabitants of these lands, have become, in a great measure, a coloured people, yet the steady march of Nature, favoured in the present age by the art of steam-weaving and the unlimited production of cheap clothing, is toward the evolution of a fair people all over the globe ; so that the present coloured population of the world will one day be thing of the past.

Aside from the physical relation of colour to exposure, there seems also to be a marked relation to the intellectual and moral status of the people. For instance, the birth of children much fairer or darker than the ordinary run of the class to which they belong seems to have some relation to the mental status and disposition of the individuals as they arrive at maturity—the fairer in colour as a rule appearing to be much more gifted as regards mental and intellectual attainment. But this most interesting phase of the subject we cannot enter upon beyond mentioning the fact that it was well-known to the sages of old and involved a very profound doctrine ; for they invariably connected darkness, in whatever form, with “evil,” as opposed to “light,” which was to them always symbolical of that which was good and beneficial, leaving it clearly to be inferred that physical darkness of complexion, in keeping with all things dark, was expressive of a certain degree of mental darkness and moral deficiency. Hence, we have in all ancient scriptures

frequent reference to the washing of the individual to the whiteness of snow and the clothing of the people in white raiment as things to be desired, being figuratively expressive of human regeneration, and involving the universal attainment of a fair complexion by all peoples as the crowning glory of Evolution through the ever-advancing culture of civilization.



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